



*How do you know if a property is contaminated and worth the trouble and cost of remediating for new uses?*

# FROM CONTAMINATION TO REJUVENATION

*Remediation Programs Turn Problem Sites into Community Assets*

**T**hey are scattered throughout urban cityscapes and pockmark small towns: abandoned warehouses, illegal dump sites, old gas stations—industrial relics from another time. Land that once hosted businesses with good blue collar jobs on the fringe

of town is now often prime real estate in a state where the population grows daily.

How do you know if a property is contaminated and worth the trouble and cost of remediating for new uses? Many developers see these properties, known as brownfields, as liabilities because of real or perceived contamination. Through the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality's [Brownfields Site Assessments Program](#) and [Voluntary Cleanup Program](#), governments, nonprofit organizations, and others can get the help they need to remediate these sites and put

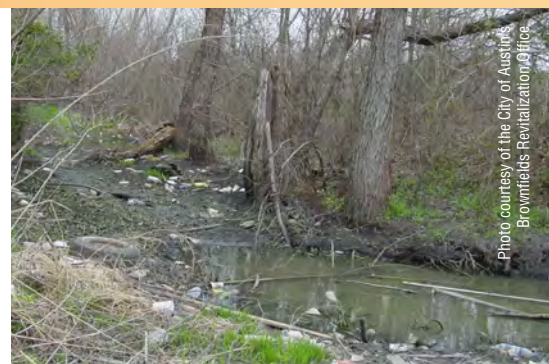
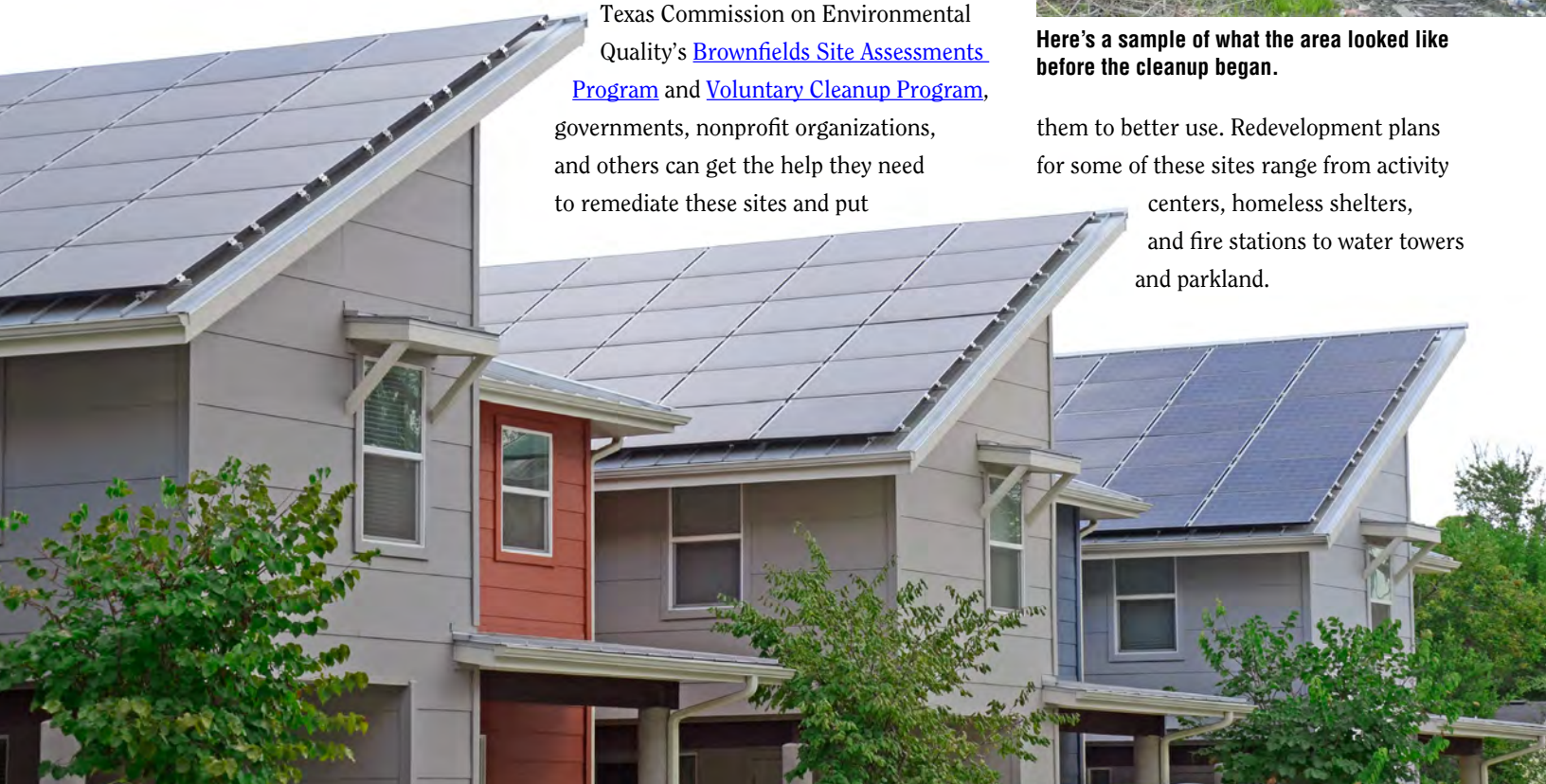


Photo courtesy of the City of Austin, Brownfields Revitalization Office

**Here's a sample of what the area looked like before the cleanup began.**

them to better use. Redevelopment plans for some of these sites range from activity centers, homeless shelters, and fire stations to water towers and parkland.





## A Win-Win Situation in Austin

The average home price in Austin is climbing and the expansion shows no signs of stalling. Skyrocketing real estate costs have priced many low-income families not only out of their neighborhoods but out of the market. The City of Austin has a number of goals for their community. By taking advantage of the TCEQ's remediation programs, the city built low-cost housing on a former illegal dump site in partnership with the nonprofit Guadalupe Neighborhood Development Corporation.

The Guadalupe-Saldaña Net Zero Subdivision sits on eleven acres of vacant land where historical dumping had occurred. When the project is completed, the site will contain a multi-unit subdivision transforming an existing brownfield into a mix of single-family and townhouse units with both rental and ownership opportunities for households with lower-than-average income. Additional units have been proposed as supportive and transitional rental housing. The supportive housing includes a ground-floor child-development center, staff offices, and ample community space.

## The Investigation

Taking a dump site from wasted to useful space required some effort, beginning



**Part of the 11-acre tract that will one day feature affordable housing for some of Austin's residents with lower-than-average incomes.**

with an assessment. Two monitoring wells were installed and numerous soil samples were collected across the property. Soil and groundwater samples were collected to investigate the possibility of a release from the dumping that had occurred. After an investigation, the only area of concern was lead-contaminated soil associated with the dumping of numerous battery casings.

## The Remediation

Once the problem areas were identified, the GNDC began and conducted most of the cleanup. The contaminated soil was

excavated and disposed of at an approved landfill. The City of Austin's Brownfield Revitalization Office performed confirmation sampling at various phases and once the remediation was completed. Once appropriate actions were taken, the TCEQ issued a "no further action" letter on Nov. 19, 2012, declaring the property suitable for residential land use and clearing the way for phase one of the project.

## The Transformation

Once the TCEQ gave the go-ahead, duplexes rose in place of scrap-tire piles. But this is not just any subdivision. In the Guadalupe-Saldaña Net Zero Subdivision, many of the units will produce as much energy as they consume over the year resulting in a net-zero energy bill. This is accomplished through installation of solar panels and energy-efficient building design.

## The Dedication Pays Off

Four duplexes in the new neighborhood are complete, housing eight families with lower-than-average income. These are the first phase in a broader vision for the neighborhood.

A total of 125 affordable houses—some for sale and some for rent—of



**These four duplexes house eight families and feature solar panels that produce power for the residents, turning what was an ecological mess into a shining example of green building efficiency.**

different types including single-family, duplexes, and town houses, are contemplated for the subdivision.

A portion of the site will be open space, including walking trails and a biofiltration pond that will assist with water quality management. These housing opportunities are the result of collaboration between the TCEQ, the City of Austin, and the GNDC, a nonprofit corporation that helps single parents and their children break the cycle of poverty by providing a supportive

community with affordable housing, developmental childcare, programs to train them in life skills and empower them, and individual coaching.

### The EPA Takes Notice

Last summer the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency gave the City of Austin a \$400,000 grant for assessment and testing of brownfield sites. The money is to be used for the redevelopment of brownfields into affordable housing communities, urban gardens, and parks. ♻️

### For More Information

The TCEQ's Remediation Division works with groups and individuals as they redevelop land.

Brownfields Site Assessments Program  
[www.tceq.texas.gov/remediation/bsa/bsa.html](http://www.tceq.texas.gov/remediation/bsa/bsa.html)

Voluntary Cleanup Program  
[www.tceq.texas.gov/remediation/vcp/vcp.html](http://www.tceq.texas.gov/remediation/vcp/vcp.html)

List of all TCEQ Remediation Programs  
[www.tceq.texas.gov/remediation](http://www.tceq.texas.gov/remediation)

Austin Brownfields Revitalization Office  
[austintexas.gov/brownfields](http://austintexas.gov/brownfields)



*Natural Outlook* is published monthly by the TCEQ's Agency Communications Division. Articles are not copyrighted and may be reproduced. (Photos and graphics that are credited to other sources may not be used without their permission.) Please credit the TCEQ for material used and send a copy to the editor: Natural Outlook, MC 118, TCEQ, P.O. Box 13087, Austin, TX 78711-3087. Or e-mail <ac@tceq.texas.gov>, or fax 512-239-5010.

✉️ To sign up to receive e-mail alerts of new issues, visit [www.tceq.texas.gov/goto/outlook](http://www.tceq.texas.gov/goto/outlook).

How is our customer service? [www.tceq.texas.gov/customersurvey](http://www.tceq.texas.gov/customersurvey)

The TCEQ is an equal opportunity employer. The agency does not allow discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, disability, age, sexual orientation, or veteran status.